

USA's BOY SCOUTS AND WORLD WAR I LIBERTY LOAN BONDS

By: T.P. McDermott © 2000

The United States Postal Service (USPS) on February 3, 1998 issued a pane or sheet of 15 stamps to commemorate the 1910's decade in their Celebrate the Century series. It was the second pane of the planned ten for the series. Of the fifteen stamps on the sheet, one stamp shows a boy scout and a girl scout. Their organizations were founded in 1910 and 1912 and were thus included on the sheet. Each sheet has a related photo as the bottom background. The 1910 sheet's photograph shows a large group of Boy Scouts running away from the camera while carrying American flags. The printed caption on the back of the sheet reads "On New York City's Fifth Avenue, Boy Scouts participate in a Patriotic 'Wake Up America' rally. People were encourage to buy World War I Liberty Loan Bonds."

The printed caption on the reverse of both the sheet and packaging material reads: "On New York City's Fifth Avenue, Boy Scouts participate in a patriotic 'Wake Up America' rally. People were encouraged to buy World War I Liberty Bonds" OOPS! For historians there is a problem with the USPS caption. Let's examine the facts.

BACKGROUND

Europe had been fighting a war for over 27 months when Woodrow Wilson in November 1916 won the American presidency for the second time. The cliffhanger election had its results hanging in balance for days while the ballots were counted. Most Americans know that Wilson's election campaign was based on "He kept us out of the war" but few can remember his opponent Charles Evans Hughes. He is best known for having given up the lifetime job of a Supreme Court Justice for a unsuccessful run for the Presidency. Events between Wilson's election and his second inauguration in March 1917, would affect both Wilson's and America's future. Zimmermann affair and a renewed submarine warfare campaign would cause the nation to undergo drastic changes. On April 2 Wilson asked Congress to pass a resolution on the state of war. The first war bond drive would not be held until mid-May 1917 and by then, the term "Wake Up, America" was no longer pertinent. America had already sprung into action.

WAKE UP, AMERICA

Americans did have a few Preparedness



Figure 1: Bottom Selvedge of US Scott's Number 3183 "Celebrate the Century Series - 1910's"

(Continued on page 69)

MAY/JUNE 2002 68



(Continued from page 68)

Day parades prior to the war but the term "Wake Up, America" was used for special April 17, 1917 event. On that day, the anniversary of the first battle of the Revolutionary War, a huge kickoff rally and parade for military recruitment was held in New York City. Many different organizations participated. The participants numbered 60,000 persons, nine-tenths of them were women and children. It took five hours to pass. The New York Times newspaper of April 20, 1917 reported that "The Brooklyn Council of Boy Scouts inspired an outburst of applause when one of its detachments passed the reviewing stand carrying a mass of American flags".

Rallies were used to kickoff many different activities for the home front. Today's readers must remember that this was in the days before the Web, Television and even Radio. Parades and rallies were a major part of the mass media of the times. During the Great War, almost every community in America had rallies where their local scouts participated.

The SOSSI Journal of November/ December 1998 reported that the 1910 stamp sheet's background photograph had previously appeared in the National Geographic Magazine, April 1917 issue, Volume XXXI, Number Four, page 359. The photo's caption reads "WAKE UP, AMERICA! It was an inspiring moment when, during the great parade up Fifth avenue, New York, recently, the boy scouts charged with flags flying". Another photo on page 361 shows an grand view of the Wake Up, America celebration. That caption tells a lot "....Thousands marched in the procession; hundreds of thousands lined the great thoroughfare and voiced their approval in a succession of cheers." Both photographs were copyright by Underwood & Underwood. I have confirmed it was in the April 1917 issue which also had an proclamation by President Wilson about the country's entrance into the war.

So if the scene on the bottom of the sheet

is not a Liberty Bond drive but of the Wake Up America rally, are there any other philatelic examples of the Scouts and the war bonds? The answer is YES.

WAR BONDS

In addition to increase taxation, the selling of bonds was key method used by the government to help pay for the cost of the Great War. In prior American wars, bonds were mostly sold to financial institutions. In this war, ordinary citizens were also asked to loan money to the government. Liberty Bonds, as they were named, had various values but their minimum was \$50 and had a 3.5% interest rate. The modern equivalent of the Liberty Bond is today's US Government Saving Bonds which can be bought in banks but are mostly sold through payroll deductions at one's place of employment.

After letters from their sons in uniforms, Liberty Bonds were cherished documents in American homes in 1917-18. They were evidence of a man's loyalty and devotion to his country. The pressure to buy them was enormous. Four times during the course of the war (only 20 months for the Americans), the government asked it's citizens for loans of billions of dollars. Leadership committees were used to organize all sorts of organizations and groups. These groups would then canvas their people about the need to finance the war and the necessity of "doing one's bit" for the country. Most bonds were actually bought as a way of identifying with "the boys" (young soldiers) who were about to go to France. One might say that the government had the bond selling campaigns more for the development of patriotic support than for the money raised. The American people bought eighteen billion dollars worth of Liberty Bonds during the course of the war, four billion dollars beyond the government's needs. A fifth campaign held after the Armistice, in May 1919, would sell their bonds as Victory Bonds. Future economists would recognize the effects of withdrawing money from an exploding wartime

(Continued on page 70)

69 MAY/JUNE 2002



(Continued from page 69)

economy.

In later 1917, the government developed and issued War Savings Stamps as a means of



reaching more of its citizens. By selling hopefully stamps, even the poorest could participate and save in small increments until they had accumulated value of a bond. Two stamps were available, a twenty-five cents Thrift Stamp and a five dollars

War Saving Certificate Stamp. The five dollar value sold for \$4.15 in April 1918 but its future cost and value would increase as time came closer to the maturity date of January 1, 1923.

THE SCOUTS ROLE

The Boy Scouts were successful sellers of bonds in earlier Liberty Bond drives. In the first loan, by personal solicitation, the Boy Scouts of America raised \$23,000,000 and in the second loan they raised \$102,000,000. In these early campaigns, mostly those who had large amounts of surplus, expendable money were bond sub-Secretary of the Treasury, William scribers. Gibbs McAdoo made a different appeal to James E West, Chief Scout Executive for the Third Liberty Loan Campaign. A February 17, 1918's news article reported that the Boy Scouts of America would participate in a special house to house campaign to sell war saving and thrift stamp as part of the Campaign. It was the wish of President Wilson that the scouts be held in reserve and then sent out to gather subscriptions from sources not ordinarily covered in the general routine of a Liberty Loan drive. The Boy Scouts of America's almost 400,000 members were asked to be the clean uppers. They would be the "gleaners after

the reapers" and canvas the country to get commitment to purchase Thrift and /or War Saving stamps during the last week of the drive. On April 27,1918 the New York scouts started their participation in the Third Liberty Loan campaign with a send off rally at Liberty Loan Park at Madison Avenue and Thirty-eighth Street. In order to make the participation of the Boy Scouts in the War Saving Plan as effective as possible, the Government Printing Office had printed a brochure for the Boy Scouts, giving all the details of the plan. It gave suggestive tips for salesmanship based upon the points of the Scout Law. According to the rules laid down for the scouts' participation in the Third Campaign they were prohibited from taking subscription from corporations or corporation officers. The scouts would confine themselves to personal solicitation; their duty being to gather in all the small subscriptions that were available after the main sources have been exhausted by the regular bond committees. This time every citizen, including those who had never saved before or only had small change to spare and even those without funds necessary for their family, would be asked. The scouts would assure that everyone had the opportunity to be a subscriber and get the last available quarter into the government coffins. The government's goal wasn't the amount of money that the scouts would raise; but to obtain the patriotic commitments of all the nation's citizens.

THE TOOLS

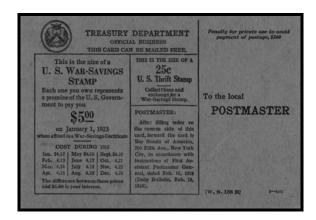


Figure 3: Obverse of Redish Orange sales postcard

(Continued on page 71)

MAY/JUNE 2002 70



(Continued from page 70)

To give full recognition to the work of the scouts, a scheme of identifying and recording their sales on a printed franked red postcard was implemented. Upon obtaining a citizen's commit-

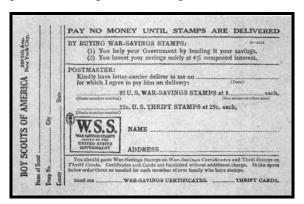


Figure 4: The reverse of the Redish Orange sales postcard with the record of order

ment to make a purchase, the scout would mail the card which was pre-addressed to the local postmaster. The post office would arrange to de-

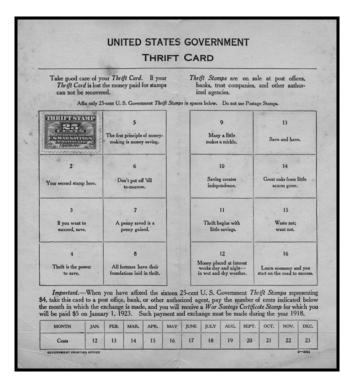


Figure 5: Inside of the Thrift Card, used to paste Savings Stamps

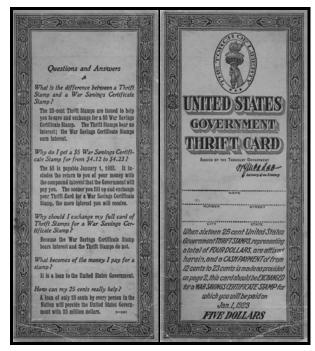


Figure 6: Back (to left) and front covers of the Thrift Cards

liver the stamps per the information on the card and collect the money. (The postcards would than be forwarded to the national scout headquarters in New York City to credit the effort of the scout.) The stamps were similar to postage or revenue stamps and therefore were treated as accountable paper by the post office. The purchasing citizen would paste his stamps on a government provide card or booklet until he had the number required for the purchase of a bond. Outside of the campaign period, stamps were available at the post office, at other rallies and during future loan campaigns.

Awards were available to the scouts. When the national scout headquarters received twenty-five different red postcards of a particular scout, he would receive an "Achievement Button". When he had orders for a total of \$250 in stamps from twenty-five or more individuals he would receive an "Ace Medal". It was named after the new, exciting award given by the French government to its most daring aviators.

(Continued on page 72)

71 MAY/JUNE 2002



(Continued from page 71)

OTHER INFORMATION

Scouts participates in many different ways in the war effort which included planting war gardens to raise food, conducting a census of black walnut trees to identify timber needed for airplane propellers and gun stocks, collecting peach pits and nut shells for use in filters of gas masks; as dispatch bearers or government literature distributors and provided general assistance to other war time organizations. Most of these activities would be repeated less than twenty-five years later in World War Two.

Scout membership enrollment was rapid due to the exposure and popularity that the scouts received from their war activities and great popular support of Scouting In the five loan drives the scouts sold 2,328,308 bond subscriptions amounting to \$354,859,262. Over two million War Saving Stamps were sold totaling \$43,043,698.

The Girl Scouts of the United States participated in the Wake Up, America rally and at least one of the 1918 Liberty Loan campaigns as the existence of a Girl Scout medal is known. The words on the back says it was presented on behalf of the US Treasure and is similar to the Boy Scout Medal given to scouts who sold ten or more bonds.

COLLECTABLES

USPS Stamp Sheet for the 1910's from the 'Celebrate the Century' series. USPS Item:5538P Its background photo is the patriotic "Wake Up America" rally. This photo first published in the National Geographic was also used on the book jacket for Mr Steven Jantzen's book.

Savings Stamps, specifically War Savings Stamps WS1 and WS2 as listed in Scott's Specialized Catalogue of U.S. Stamps. These stamps were first issued in late 1917.

Franked Postcard (W.S. 138R) used by scouts to record the ordering of stamps for sale to an individual. It has been reported that five million cards were produced however the supply was almost immediately exhausted. (A similar post card was available for non-scout sellers. It was W.S. 138 without the R.)

War Savings Certificates and Thrift Cards upon which the stamps are pasted until the required amount is saved.

Postcard showing the famous J.C. Leyen-decker's Liberty Loan poster picturing the scouts



in the Liberty Loan Campaigns. There are available reprints of this postcard.

Two stamps from a set issued by Liberia on September 25, 2000 (See page 73 for illustrations)

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Murray, William D. The History of the Boy Scouts of America 1937

Jantzen, Steven. Hooray for Peace; Hurrah for War 1971 ISBN:0-394-80496-6

(Continued on page 73)

MAY/JUNE 2002 72



(Continued from page 72)

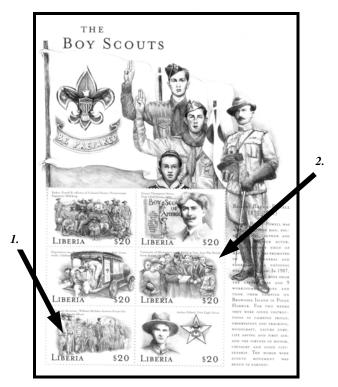


Figure 8: Two issues from this Liberia souvenir sheet: 1. Treasury Secretary William McAdoo Honors Scouts for their War Bond efforts and 2. University of Michigan's Coach - Fielding Yost, Buys War Bonds from Scouts, 1917

Reis, Mitch. The BOY SCOUTS of AMERICA during WORLD WAR I & II 1984 (A pamphlet covering Scouting memorabilia items of the period)

Semeniuk, John Treasury postal card facilities acquisition of War Saving Stamps (Article in The American Revenuer March 1998)

Semeniuk, John WW I Treasury postal card for ordering War Saving Stamps (Article in The American Revenuer September 2000)

Fricke, Charles A A World War I 25 cents Thrift Stamp Christmas Card (Article in Scott Stamp Monthly December 1999

AUTHOR'S REMARKS

I wish to thanks The White Plains Public

Library for the help provided by their excellent personnel and resources.

The author can be contacted:

Via e-mail at stampstp@msn.com Via mail: T.P. McDermott

> 25 Hillside Ave White Plains NY 10601-1111

USA

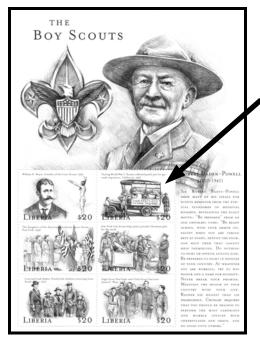


Figure 9: And one issue from this Liberia souvenir sheet. During World War I, Scouts collected peach pits for gasmask respirators, California, 1916

Scouts on Stamps Society International (SOSSI) is a philatelic group dedicated to the collecting of stamps honoring the Boy and Girl Scout and Girl Guide Movements. Membership Application on Page 77, this Journal.

73 MAY/JUNE 2002